

The Mungo National Park Aboriginal Owners Research Project

The *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (ALR Act) and the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPW Act) provide the legislative framework for the Aboriginal ownership and joint management of lands in NSW which are culturally significant to Aboriginal people and of high conservation value. In accordance with Part 9 of the ALR Act, the Registrar of the ALR Act must establish the Register of Aboriginal owners for lands in NSW giving priority to Schedule 14 listed lands in the NPW Act and those to which section 36A of the ALR Act applies.

Mungo National Park has been listed on Schedule 14 to be returned to Aboriginal people since 1996. The Registrar, ALR Act and the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) have had ongoing discussions regarding the commencement of a Mungo National Park Aboriginal Owner Research Project as the Registrar received ongoing requests from Aboriginal people in far western NSW to open the Register of Aboriginal owners (the Register) for Mungo National Park.

As a result, the Registrar will carry out initial discussion with the communities associated with Mungo National Park about the Registered Aboriginal Owner process and the research project that goes with it. This process will involve many conversations with the Aboriginal community around Mungo National Park about the Aboriginal ownership scheme and what the Aboriginal owner research project and registration process involves, including ongoing discussions about any information gathered by researchers and information known within community. In this way, the project will engage with individuals and families across the established cultural groups associated with Mungo National Park.

It is not a process that is conducted for a particular established group or individuals. It is not a native title process and will not obstruct any existing native title claims as the Aboriginal ownership process acknowledges and accommodates the federal arrangement. The Office of the Registrar, ALR Act will also coordinate with OEH/NPWS to ensure that the Mungo National Park advisory groups currently in place are engaged in the process.

After initial consultation and liaison on the process, a comprehensive research project will be undertaken by the Office of the Registrar, ALR Act, and will underpin the Registration of Aboriginal Owners for Mungo National Park. Similar research projects have been conducted for all seven of the existing Aboriginal owned conservation areas in NSW. These include:

- Biamanga National Park
- Gulaga National Park
- Mutawintji National Park
- Mount Grenfell Historic Site
- Mount Yarrowyck Nature Reserve
- Gaagal Wanggaan (South Beach) National Park
- Worimi Conservation Lands

A research project for Mungo National Park will include the correlation of historical, anthropological, archaeological and genealogical information to provide a framework by which the Registrar is able to register Aboriginal people who:

- are directly descended from the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the cultural area in which the land is situated
- have a cultural association with the land that derives from the traditions, observances, customs, beliefs or history of the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the land.

The first phases of the project will include:

- initial community liaison and meetings
- an information gap analysis
- further community engagement and initial fieldwork
- investigation of historical, anthropological and genealogical records.

The Aboriginal ownership scheme delivers genuine land rights to Aboriginal people reconnecting them to land that is culturally significant to them.

For further information, email the Office of the Registrar, Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 at adminofficer@oralra.nsw.gov.au